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SUBJECT: FRENCH PLANS FOR AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Afghanistan Coordinator Patrick Moon met MFA DAS for South Asia Didier Leroy on February 27 to discuss next steps in Afghanistan, including an Afghanistan Donors conference and potential increases in French military contributions to the security effort. Leroy noted the Afghan Donors Conference would emphasize the importance of a civil component to work in tandem with security efforts to promote stability and democracy in Afghanistan. While military planning was the province of the Ministry of Defense, Leroy opined that France was likely to increase its military contribution with an announcement at the Bucharest Summit. He expected additional troops to be deployed to eastern Afghanistan. Leroy said that France would find ways to increase assistance to Afghanistan, while downplaying prospects for a substantial new financial contribution. Both Moon and Leroy agreed that improving public understanding of the importance of the ISAF effort in Afghanistan was key to continued success.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: Moon's visit helped highlight for France our expectations for a substantial increase in French financial contributions for Afghanistan. That said, the MFA is sending clear signals to limit U.S. expectations for a substantial increase in France's financial contributions as co-chair of the June donors conference. The French may see a trade-off in terms of their ability to deliver in both civilian and military fields given the extremely challenging budget environment currently facing the GOF. END SUMMARY.

CONFERENCE: focus on strategy plus donation resources

¶3. (C) During a one day visit on February 27, Afghanistan Coordinator Pat Moon presented U.S. views on next steps in Afghanistan to MFA DAS for South Asia Didier Leroy, urging an increase in French troop contributions to the security operation and a substantial increase in French development assistance at the Afghanistan Donors Conference to be held in Paris in June.

¶4. (C) Leroy outlined French thinking for the June conference emphasizing that France hopes to incorporate strategic discussions into the Conference, rather than focus solely on increased aid pledges. Leroy described a holistic approach with military, civil and economic elements coming together at the conference. Using the Afghanistan Compact agreed at the London conference in early 2006 as a base, supplemented with the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), France hopes to amplify the strategic discussion about next steps for Afghanistan. Leroy added that the conference is a chance for France to "update its commitment."

15. (C) Acknowledging that France is not one of the major donors in Afghanistan, Leroy noted that, traditionally French donations to the International Red Cross and UNHCR take priority over donations to individual nations. (Note: France was the 16th largest bilateral donor to UNHCR in 2007 and 11th donor to the IRC in 2006. These contributions do not capture French donations made through the European Union.) Nevertheless, Leroy said France will increase its civilian aid commitment to Afghanistan at the Conference. Moon noted the U.S. hopes that the international community will match or exceed Afghanistan's target, while emphasizing the importance of large pledge amounts to show this as a success story to the media and other international actors. Moon expressed appreciation for the GOF's decision to host the Donor Conference along with U.S. interest in working with France to ensure the Conference's success.

The Illicit Drug Trade: A corrosive influence on stability operations

16. (C) Leroy said France appreciates the corrosive effect of the narcotics trade on our efforts in Afghanistan and seeks to make a stronger commitment to fighting drugs. He did not have specifics on anti-narcotics program contributions. Leroy added that France is considering whether to host a separate international meeting on the drug trade in Afghanistan in May or June or in conjunction with the Afghan Donors Conference. Leroy said that France will demarche Afghan partners proposing a security council declaration encouraging countries to ratify the convention on reporting transfers of precursor chemicals, thereby contributing to combating the illicit narcotics trade.

TROOPS: A French contribution in the East more likely than in the South

17. (C) Leroy reported that France will announce a "significant reinforcement of commitment" at the Bucharest Summit. While noting the Ministry of Defense took the lead in planning French military deployments, he said that increased troop contributions would most likely be deployed in eastern Afghanistan. He said such a deployment would be logistically more feasible for the French than a more costly deployment to southern Afghanistan. Leroy said internal debate within the administration continued about whether to deploy PRTs in Afghanistan. Leroy remarked that the Afghans have not insisted on a need for PRTs in their conversations with the French, which has led Paris to conclude that the GOA did not place a high priority on securing a French commitment to lead a PRT. (Embassy Comment: In all of our meetings with French officials, only the MFA has been open to considering deployment of a PRT -- the military remains adamantly opposed. See Paris cable 163)

PUBLIC OPINION: A Key battleground

18. (C) Moon and Leroy agreed NATO must emphasize Afghan achievements as part of the broader effort to boost public understanding of the importance of the international mission in Afghanistan and European security interests tied to success there. Leroy, who served eight years in Afghanistan, is optimistic that the situation on the ground is much improved and underscored strong Afghan public support for international efforts to bring stability to Afghanistan. (NOTE: Leroy's comments follow what appears to be an increasing French effort to publicize what France is doing in Afghanistan. A prime example: In a documentary devoted to the French military effort in Afghanistan which aired on the LCI news channel on February 26, the journalist who presented the piece stated flatly that "even though French troops have been beside the Americans in Afghanistan since 2002, only now is the French government working to publicize that." In

addition, this documentary, unlike much other press coverage of Afghanistan, did not leave the impression that the U.S.-led stabilization effort is doomed to failure. END NOTE)

Moon agreed that winning public opinion in Europe will contribute to success in Afghanistan; he added that the Bucharest Summit could also improve public understanding of the stakes involved. He also noted that improved relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are cause for cautious optimism.

UN Special Representative

19. (C) On the prospect of identifying a Special Representative to coordinate international efforts for Afghanistan following the withdrawal of Paddy Ashdown, Moon noted a successful candidate would need to have sufficient political stature to garner international support. Suggesting a French preference for Canadian John Manley as coordinator, Leroy said France has not made a decision on whether they would support Norwegian Kai Eide or John Manley, but noted that Canada has a strong position in Afghanistan.

110. (C) Comment: France under President Sarkozy has reiterated a strong, long-term commitment to Afghanistan that will be made more concrete at both the NATO Summit in Bucharest and the Afghanistan Conference in Paris. French policy makers are engaged in an internal debate over the exact shape of this commitment. USG clarity on exactly what we seek in French military and civilian contributions will help our efforts. The French may see a trade-off in terms of their ability to deliver in both civilian and military fields given the extremely challenging budget environment currently facing the GOF.

112. (U) This cable has been cleared by Afghanistan Coordinator Patrick Moon.

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